

The Ballarat Naturalist

May 2016



Weather for Field Naturalists

Presented by Dr Ian Bell .

Our speaker, Dr Ian Bell, a meteorologist, asked us to consider how much the weather affects our lives. It makes a big difference in many ways. At various times we can feel too hot, or freezing cold. Our gardens and farms can suffer from being too dry as has happened for the last six months. The weather can also affect the probability of seeing various plants flowering, fungi fruiting bodies appearing and the presence or absence of certain bird species. Our planned excursions may have to be cancelled if the conditions are not safe because of strong wind, very wet weather or total fire ban.

During his talk Ian made use of various items available from the internet. The isobar weather charts in newspapers and TV news are familiar to all. There is much more information available if one knows where to look. Ian showed us the meteorology bureau site: <http://www.bom.gov.au>

Weather satellites have provided meteorologist with a real time view of cloud cover from space. They can watch the movement of cyclones that are out of the effective range of radar. Ian had the task to help provide weather forecasts for the Sydney Olympics. Their forecasts for rain were based on radar that provided good coverage for local areas.



Photo: What will the clouds bring?

We were shown a video of the global cloud cover through 2014-15. The general movement of cloud could be seen in an easterly direction around the world. In high pressure cells the clouds are moved by the wind in a counter-clockwise direction in the southern hemisphere. Ian explained how high pressure produced good weather and low pressure bad weather. Farmers hoping for rain might differ in

what they think is good weather. There is a saying in farming circles that there is more money in mud than in dust.

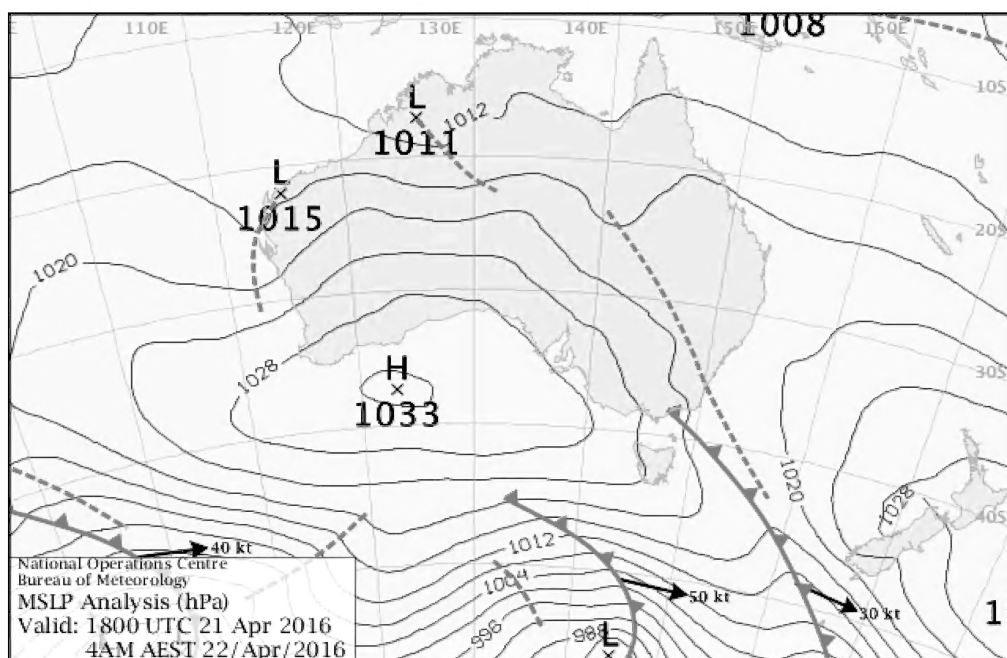


Photo: Weather map from <http://www.bom.gov.au>.

The El Nino and other factors have been the cause of the recent below average rainfall in eastern Australia. An El Nino event is caused by the upwelling of cool water in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. He said that there was only a 40% chance of above average rainfall in April this year, and in May a more than 50% chance.

Ian showed a chart of summer temperatures from 2005-2015. He said that the normal bell-curve distribution of the highest-day temperatures had, in recent years, changed. There are now more record high temperatures.

When Ian invited questions or comments from us there was a discussion about some of the terms that weather forecasters use. We hear various terms used such as *light* or *heavy rain*, and *scattered* or *isolated showers*. Probabilities about the amounts of rain we can expect are now been used more often. Weather forecast accuracy has certainly improved with the use of more information via new technology. Yet it is unlikely ever be 100% accurate.

We have all been disappointed when our wished for fine day or rain did not eventuate as it was confidently forecasted. Ian's talk provided us with much information and resources that we can use to increase our new knowledge about forecasting the weather.

Les Hanrahan

STOP PRESS

NB on P8 - changes of program in the syllabus for May & June.

Geelong District Excursion, 2 April

The April excursion was a composite of visits to three separate areas, beginning at Serendip Sanctuary on the northern edge of Lara.

The ponds at the Serendip entrance provided habitat for Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal, Dusky Moorhen and Magpie Goose. Trees in the woodland area contained Spotted Pardalote, White-plumed Honey-eater and a pair of Crested Shrike-tit. The main lake was dry but the marshland in front of the bird hide had water to attract ducks, Masked Lapwing and Black-fronted Dotterel. Whistling and Black Kite perched in the surrounding Red Gums. The sanctuary has captive breeding programs to conserve threatened species including Australian Bustard, Brolga, Bush Stone-curlew and Freckled Duck kept in aviaries. Other species seen in the aviaries were Blue-faced Honeyeater, Red-rumped Parrot, Tawny Frogmouth, Buff-breasted Rail and Red-browed Finch.



Photo: Tiger Quolls
at Serendip

Tiger Quolls were feeding on a block of frozen ice containing day old chickens.

Our second stop at Avalon Beach has a row of fishing shacks behind a low dune on Corio Bay. We visited the area to see birds on the old Cheatham salt ponds. Salt production has ceased but some of the ponds are filled with sea water. The water level was high so little mud was exposed for waders but we did see Red-capped Plover and Red-necked Stint. Larger birds were Eastern Great and Little Egret. Silver Gulls, Crested Tern, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants were seen over the ocean. On the way out of the area we saw hundreds of Black-winged Stilt, a tight flock of Banded Stilt, 20 Red-necked Avocet and Grey and Chestnut Teal.

The feature of the excursion was the night walk at Mt Rothwell, our third and last stop. Mt Rothwell is a privately owned conservation and research centre of 453 hectares surrounded by a predator-proof

fence. We arrived in the evening and had our picnic tea while waiting for the sun to set. Two dingoes are being raised with the hope that they can be trained to deter predators from entering the area. As darkness fell we began a guided walk through the granite-hill grassland section. The first animal sighted was a Southern Brown Bandicoot as it scurried under shrubs. Brushtail Possums were seen in a dead tree with many hollows. Also a Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby was seen hopping over granite rocks. This species has become rare in Victoria and a breeding program with animals from the NSW population is under way.

As it became darker we saw good numbers of Rufous Bettong. The reddish fur was hard to distinguish by torch-light but the long tail which is used to carry grass when nest-building was easily seen. Also several Tasmanian Pademelon were seen. These are small, rounded, wallaby-sized animals which have become extinct in mainland Australia. The most numerous animal was the Eastern Barred Bandicoot readily identified by the pale bars on the hindquarters. The only carnivore for the night was an Eastern Quoll. It was the size of a cat with white spots on the darker-furred body.

The return trip to the picnic area was through Red Box / Yellow Box woodland where many of the same animals were seen but Ringtail Possum was added to our list.

We thanked our guide, Sharon, for leading the interesting walk.

John Gregurke

SEANA Autumn Camp 2016

On Saturday, a perfect day, a large group of us took the 4-hour boat trip into Port Phillip Bay, including the area which encompasses the Port Phillip Marine park. We were accompanied by a Park's Ranger.

We first crossed the bay near The Rip and were invited to watch changing sea depths on the boat's sonagraph. The depths dramatically dropped as we crossed over the channel, which is also the original course of the Yarra River. At Point Nepean side, evidence of the military protection of The Heads was pointed out and further along, the Quarantine station. Next we stopped at South Fort, a rocky outcrop that also housed guns and ammunition in a number of underground passages and could hold up to a 100 soldiers. The ruins of a disappearing canon was noted. We sailed on to Chinaman's Hat, another reconstructed military site.

This site is now occupied by a bachelor colony of Australian fur

seals. We watched for awhile, observing their frolicking and sunbaking (and the snorkelers who had paid to swim with them). Next we moved on to Mud Islands composed of sand and shell grit and had a short time ashore to read the signs, observe plants and collect some water and sea grass specimens. On board we found several thread-like pipe fish and a couple of shrimps among our specimens.



Photo: Fur Seals

Our final stop was at Popes Eye, a semi -circle of rocks that has a large number of Gannets nesting including juvenile ones. This area is also an excellent dive-spot, the diversity of plants and fish rivalling the Great Barrier Reef. The evening guest speaker was our Park's Ranger who enthralled us with his underwater photos of this region, a fitting conclusion to our great day-out.

Val Hocking

More about Trip to Mud Islands - John Gregurke

The boat from Queenscliff delivered us to the eastern shore of Mud Islands. We were able to step onto dry land from the ramp at the front of the boat. The islands are well vegetated with Coast Saltbush *Atriplex cinerea*, Austral Seablite *Suaeda australis* and Hairy Spinifex *Spinifex sericeus*. These plants bind the sand allowing the islands to grow 10m since a signboard was erected several years ago.

During a walk around the islands we saw a range of shorebirds including Ruddy Turnstone, Red-capped Plover, Double-banded Plover and Red-necked Stint. Several Pacific Gull were seen and one Kelp Gull was identified by its slimmer bill and more white in the folded wing. Crested and Fairy Tern, Pied and Little Pied Cormorant were flying offshore. Golden-headed Cisticola and White-fronted Chat perched on shrubs. Around the sheltered lagoon Sharp-



tailed Sandpiper were feeding among the Beaded Glasswort on the saltmarsh and a Buff-banded Rail was feeding along the edge. Raptors seen during the day were Whistling Kite and Swamp Harrier.

On the return trip we visited South

Photo: Field Nats on Mud Is.

bika & Indra). Bill E. also joined the group on Saturday at Devil's Kitchen, providing geological information and the local history knowledge of another guest, James Brown from the Woody Yaloak Historical Society.

General Business Tomorrow's Club field trip: *Serendip Sanctuary, Avalon Beach waders and Mt Rothwell Fauna Sanctuary.*

Show and Tell/ Field Reports

Claire reported thousands of small spiders just everywhere festooning every bush, effectively caging every space at Werribee Sewerage Farm.

Emily recorded the first sighting of Brown-headed Honeyeaters at her property in Scarsdale and Dereel Bushland Reserve, along with good numbers of Parson's Bands orchids and Tiny Greenhoods appearing, joining the still-persisting Bearded Midge Orchids.

Les spotted two Wedge-tailed Eagles near East High for first time.

Carol told us of an exotic sighting on her recent trip to Norway: pair of White-tailed Sea Eagles grappling with their talons and doing a 360° roll. She also mentioned that a wildlife photography exhibition currently showing at Geelong Wool Museum is well worth a look.

Elsbeth reported the first discovery of a male Brush-tailed Phascogale (dead) near Mt Egerton, and the ongoing presence of the Copperhead snake in her vegie patch.

Tammie saw 6-10 White-winged Choughs highly agitated at the bold-as-brass presence of a huge Wedge-tailed Eagle sitting in the middle of a clearing. Male and female Scarlet Robins were also active at her property in Scarsdale.

Wayne spotted Laurie Levy at opening of the duck-shooting season. John G. reported Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills in Kororoit Ck, Altona.



Photo: Jeffrey Crawley took this photo of a white sparrow on Hakubaku fence, Waringa Drive

Channel Fort which was built in the 1800's as part of the defence network for Port Phillip Bay. At Chinaman's Hat, Australian Fur Seal were resting and swimming in the water with Dolphins. At Popes Eye Australasian Gannet, Black-face Cormorant and Ruddy Turnstone were on the rocks.

Mid-month Excursion -Tue s 17 May

Usual departure time- 9.30am and place- carpark in Gillies St.

Emily Noble will lead an excursion
at Surface Hill, Smythesdale.

Among flora to be seen are Bushy Club Moss and orchids.

Excerpts from April Club Meeting Minutes

Opening &Apologies: President J Gregurke welcomed 26 members and a visitor. Apologies: M Sorrell, R Winton, M Landry, A Riddell, B Murphy, J Petheram, J Metcalf, J Morrish, K Elder, P Billing.

Correspondence: IN From: Bush Heritage Australia: Craig Whiteford DELWP- invitation to the next State Wide Flora & Fauna Teams video-conference on April 28; email sharing a series of announcements from DELWP in the last week for our interest and involvement: public consultation open for “Water for Victoria” discussion paper from March 16 to April 29, 2016; public consultation now open on Vic’s 20 year draft biodiversity plan, until May 15;

OUT: invitation to Biodiversity Action Planning workshops; tour invitation to Bush Heritage reserves in Nardoo Hills;

Business Arising from Correspondence: Consider opportunities for undertaking conservation projects funded under DELWP’s Threatened Species Protection Initiative. Get involved in the many biodiversity/ environment-related document reviews/ workshops going on at the moment: Water for Victoria; Victoria’s 20-year draft Biodiversity Plan; Native Vegetation Permitted Clearing Regulations; local Biodiversity Action Plans.

Reports: Treasurer's Report: Opening balance \$7,493.26 Income \$527 Expenses \$225.30 Closing balance: \$7,794.96

Easter Camp of Junior’s Group of the Field Naturalists’ Club of Victoria: Peter & Emily N. hosted about 40 enthusiastic and observant camp attendees at their bush block & adjacent Enfield State Forest on the Friday afternoon, with the indispensable help of 7 other FNCB members (John & Elaine, Bill E., Tammie & Ray and Am-

CALENDAR 2016

May

Fri 6 *Birding in PNG*: Graham Dent, Birdlife Ballarat

Sat 7 *Exc. La Gerche Walk*: Dr. John Petheram, club member

Tues 17 *Mid-week exc. Surface Hill, Smythesdale*:
Emily Noble

Tues 26 Committee meeting at Val's

June

Fri 3 *Hollows as Habitat*: John Gregurke, club member

Sat 4 *Exc. Fungi Mt Macedon*: Les Hanrahan, club member

Committee

President John Gregurke

Vice –Pres Fran Hanrahan

Secretary Emily Noble

Treasurer Les Hanrahan

Claire Dalman

Val Hocking

Peter Dalman

John Mildren

Bill Elder

Andy Arnold

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Club email: ballaratfnc@gmail.com

Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr of Gillies and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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